

• 3rd District • 2009 Session Review

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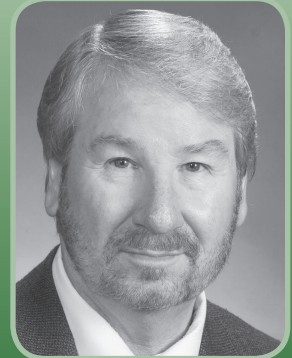
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Committees:

- Commerce & Labor (*Vice Chair*)
- Health & Human Services – Appropriations
- Transportation



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I wish I could say the 2009 legislative session was the best one ever. It would be nice to report to you that Washington's 147 elected lawmakers got together and figured out how to increase access to high-quality health care, cut class sizes in half, create a great job for anyone who wants one, and generally make this a better place to live, work and raise a family.

I wish I could say all that and more, but you know and I know that it's just not the case. These are tough times everywhere – internationally, nationally, all over the state, and here at home in Spokane.

But – and it's an important "but" – you didn't send me and my colleagues to Olympia so we could wring our hands, bellyache and whimper for 105 days. You sent us there to focus on priorities and get some important work done, even in the midst of a budget crisis, and we did. We didn't work any miracles; but against the odds this year, and without any sort of general tax increase, your Legislature was able to make progress in areas like education, environmental stewardship, health care, consumer protection and even jobs.

I'll talk a little bit about those things and some others in this newsletter, which I'm sharing with my friend and colleague, Rep. Alex Wood, as one more way to economize. As always, I hope very much to hear from as many of you as possible. We can't do our work in a vacuum, and I look forward to hearing your comments, suggestions, questions and feedback – the good and the bad.

Sincerely,


Timm Ormsby
State Representative

Dear Friends,

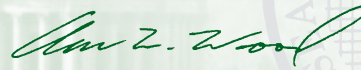
After many years of representing Spokane in Olympia, I thought the \$1.5 billion shortfall in 2001 would be the worst budget crisis I'd ever experience. We made tough cuts in great programs, but it pales in comparison to the \$5 billion hole that ballooned to at least an \$8.5 billion shortfall this last session.

I remain troubled by the deficit spending coming from the federal government, but without its help, the cuts we had to make would have been almost twice as large. We did our best to make things as fair as possible to all segments of society, but this is far from a perfect budget. Although the size of the problem was overwhelming at times, we've managed to keep moving forward on the road to recovery. We passed legislation to create 15,000 new green-economy jobs by 2020, as well as increase unemployment benefits and career training opportunities.

It looks like we're nearing the bottom of this downturn, and while it'll probably take a year or two to really recover, the good ideas we worked on this session are still in place. We've taken steps to help us maximize our state's progress into a new economic reality. Let's hope it will help us get out of the "boom & bust" pattern we have seen for too many years.

I am back in my Spokane office and welcome your questions and concerns. As always, thanks for the privilege of serving as your state representative.

Sincerely,


Alex Wood
State Representative

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000

Representative ALEX WOOD 2009 SESSION REVIEW

Assisting the unemployed and extending consumer protection rights



As Vice Chairman of the Commerce & Labor Committee, I had the opportunity to play a large part in two very important bills this session – one a rapid response to a crisis and one an old friend. The legislative process is designed to allow time for all sides to have input and for reasonable compromises to be made. But when necessary, it is amazing how quickly things can get done.

One of the big advantages Washington state had when this recession hit was our unemployment trust fund. Due to some great work, as well as compromises by the business and labor communities over the past few years, our committee had built up the biggest unemployment surplus in the nation – almost \$4 billion. From the first day of session, business, labor, the governor, and the committee worked to use that money to help people who were losing their jobs. With all sides working together, we managed to make it the first bill passed in the session. Not only did we get help on the way quickly, but we also improved long-range training benefits. With a follow-up bill, we were able to cut tax rates for businesses as well.

The old friend I worked on was a rewrite of our state's Motor Vehicle Warranty Act, better known as the "Lemon Law." For several years, we worked on bills to make small improvements to that act. Building on those efforts, the attorney general introduced "request" legislation to rewrite the whole act. I agreed to prime sponsor the bill after cautioning that it would probably have to be whittled down to make a start in only one session.

Once again, fine work and compromise among the automobile industry, labor, and the attorney general's office resulted in a law that I'm very proud of. It is only the first step in a complex section of law, but we got a lot more done in one session than I had originally believed was possible.

Working with a new House fiscal committee

Every two years, legislators have a chance to request new committee assignments. Seeing the early signs of the budget crisis, I asked to be a member of the new Health & Human Services Appropriations Committee. Considering how dependent the 3rd district is on such help, I knew this was the place I needed to be.

Prior to session, committee members joined together in small groups to focus on specific areas of a huge part of our state budget. Many creative ideas came out of this process. However, committee members remain frustrated at how much good work was negated by the rapidly growing size of the problem. In the final

days, our goal was simply to be as fair as possible in dealing with the program cuts that had to be made. I think this committee will also play a pivotal role in the next session as we re-evaluate just where we stand at that point in the budget process.

Moving forward Spokane transportation projects



I've been a member of the House Transportation Committee since my first day in the Legislature 13 years ago. It took four years to get a significant amount of money dedicated to Spokane's North-South freeway project, but since then our progress has been impressive. I was there when we broke ground on the first phase of construction eight years ago, and I will be there again when we open the first section for use by the people of Spokane. In two more years, we'll open the second section up to Highway 395 and international traffic will start using it. The challenge then will be going from Francis Avenue to the Spokane River, but we've been laying the groundwork for it in Olympia for several years now, so I think we are ready.

Of course, we haven't forgotten other needs in our area. The repaving and widening of I-90 to the Idaho border has been another project I've worked on for years and, section by section, that job is getting done. Highway 195 heading south has been a real challenge due to massive development in the area. Just this session we were able to get funding for a right-turn safety lane at the Cheney-Spokane intersection. Eventually, interchanges will be needed at several other intersections as well. It will take time, but it has to be done.

There's also a long list of other projects, including the Barker Bridge, the mess at Pines and the freeway, the Bigelow Gulch safety improvements, the Riverside extension through the Riverpoint Higher Education Campus and more. There's trouble in the transportation budget as well, but we've been able to keep the needs of Spokane in the spotlight by working with our friends from the west side of the state.

Working together for Spokane

One of the joys of serving in the legislature is the great people you meet and get to work with. Topping the list is my House seatmate, Rep. Timm Ormsby, and of course, our Senate seatmate, Majority Leader Sen. Lisa Brown. We have been a team for seven years now and by sharing the load on so many issues, we've worked to strengthen Spokane's voice in Olympia. From the 6th District, fellow Democrats Sen. Chris Marr and Rep. John Driscoll have shared their expertise and energy to maximize our impact. Reaching across the aisle, we've also worked together with new Republican members for the betterment of the people of Spokane and all of eastern Washington.

Representative TIMM ORMSBY

2009 SESSION REVIEW

Redefining Basic Education



Even people who have never seen a copy of our state constitution know by now that providing for the basic education of our young people is “the paramount duty” of the Legislature. That may seem cut-and-dried, but unfortunately, the constitution doesn’t say what “basic education” means.

Instead, it’s up to the Legislature to define what is and what is not basic education. But as the world around us changes, so do the needs of students, parents, teachers and employers. And for more than 30 years now, we’ve operated under a model that has become steadily more outdated. As a result, local taxpayers have been asked again and again to pony up and pay for things – such as buses, computers, and special ed – that fall outside the outdated boundaries of our current definition of basic education.

This session, the Legislature enacted the most sweeping changes in our K-12 system in recent memory. The education-reform bill we passed, and which the governor signed, will

- Greatly expand the definition of basic education, forcing the state to step up and relieve local districts and taxpayers of an unrealistic load;
- Ensure a new level of transparency and clarity in budgeting;
- Set a clear timeline for implementing the changes;
- Require the state Board of Education to create a comprehensive system for improving the effectiveness of underperforming schools and school districts; and
- Direct the state’s Professional Educator Standards Board to work with teachers to create a teacher-certification program that links performance standards to student learning.

Rep. Wood, Sen. Brown and I covered much of this in person at a Spokane town hall in March, but now that the bill has become law, I would be happy to field questions from constituents. Like most laws, it has opposition; the budget crisis forced us to build the framework without the ability to put up the money at the same time, and there is a legitimate concern about being able to meet these high new expectations. But, again like most laws, this one is a work in progress. By passing it now, we have ensured future Legislatures will fully fund basic education, period.

Rights for Working People, and Help for the Unemployed

The Wall Street Journal, of all places, revealed last summer that Wal-Mart had summoned many of its employees to mandatory meetings to admonish them not to support, work for or vote for Barack Obama in the presidential election. This wasn’t the first time the a business had forced workers to listen to partisan political messages, anti-union lectures, or religious

sermons. I don’t challenge any individual or business’s right to advocate its position on any issue, or a worker’s right to attend any meeting he or she wants to. But it’s impossible to justify *forcing people as a condition of their employment* to endure political, religious or other messages that aren’t a matter of their productivity or work performance. I cosponsored a bill this year to prohibit this practice in our state. It didn’t reach the floor, but that’s often the case with new legislation. The bill’s many supporters will keep working to protect worker privacy rights and the bill will ultimately become law.

I do have a piece of good news for working people hit hard by the slumping economy: The first bill passed and signed into law this session boosted unemployment insurance payments throughout 2009 by \$45 a week. Known as the Economic Security Act of 2009, the new law also expands eligibility for education programs to help people learn new, marketable skills and get the economy back in gear.

Clean Water for Washington



One of today’s greatest sources of water pollution is the rain water that flows across roads, streets, driveways and parking lots and collects grease, oil, rubber and other petroleum-based toxins on its way to lakes, streams and aquifers. As a result, we taxpayers are forced to foot the bill for expensive purification measures undertaken by our local communities. I sponsored a storm-water cleanup bill this session that would have required oil companies to pick up part of that tab by paying a fee of \$1.50 for each barrel of petroleum products that contribute to water pollution. My bill passed the House but arrived in the Senate too late for proper consideration. We’ll succeed eventually, without question. Local taxpayers shouldn’t have to pay to rid their waters of poisons produced by the most profitable industry in the U.S.

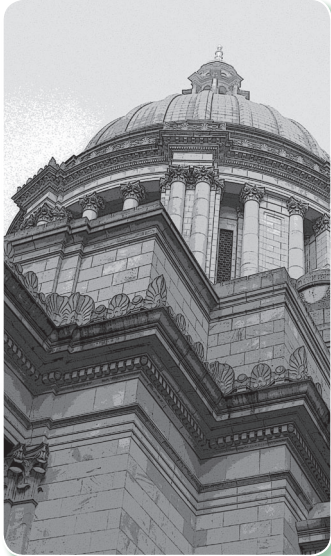
Rights for Registered Domestic Partners

The Legislature voted this year to expand the range and number of rights and responsibilities for registered domestic partners in Washington. The new law builds upon earlier laws that established the domestic-partners registry, and then recognized a number of rights and responsibilities for these same-sex couples and for others penalized financially by marriage – such as seniors who might lose significant Social Security benefits by remarrying, even though they worked for and earned those benefits. Despite the cries of opponents, this year’s legislation did not legalize same-sex marriage; it simply says these families deserve the same legal rights and responsibilities as other families. That sounds like basic American fair play to me. As President Kennedy once said, “In giving rights to others which belong to them, we give rights to ourselves and to our country.”

Representatives TIMM ORMSBY & ALEX WOOD

2009 SESSION REVIEW

Capital Budget



Another way to say "capital budget" is "jobs." Good, solid, family wage jobs with real benefits. The capital budget is what you can point to when someone pulls out the tired old cliché that claims "government doesn't create jobs." This year, that budget is pumping about \$110 million into our city and surrounding area, for projects ranging from floor repairs at the Spokane Veterans Hospital (\$168,000) to more than \$43 million for long-overdue improvements at the Community Colleges of Spokane. Between

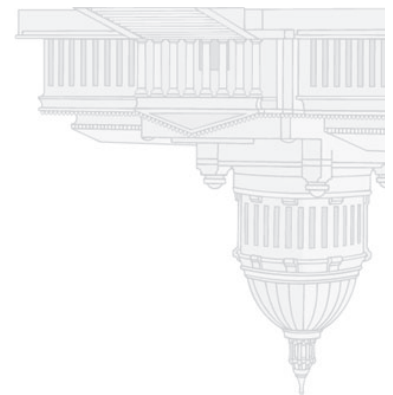
those extremes are dozens of other investments to improve our community, with most designed to expand education, workforce and skill-upgrade opportunities in eastern Washington's largest city. For a full list of Spokane capital-budget projects, you can visit either of our websites. And in the meantime, consider this: According to a UW study, more than 30 jobs are created for every \$1 million in construction spending. Multiply that by 110 for our community this year, and that's a lot of our family members and friends and neighbors who won't be unemployment statistics.

Looking to the Future



We read that maybe the economic elevator has hit the basement and is headed back up. That's scant comfort for the family whose home is in foreclosure. It doesn't ease the pain of the breadwinner whose job has disappeared or been exported to another country. As Americans, we tend to be optimists, and we're hopeful that we've seen the worst of the economic crisis. But as President Obama has said, it took a long time to get into this condition, and it will take a while to recover.

Rest assured that we're working during the interim to do what we can next session to help bring jobs to Washington, and improve our schools, health care, environment, public safety and the other key areas that affect our quality of life.



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